

Arid Lands Environment Centre

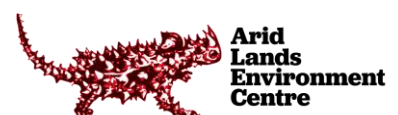
16th February 2022

IMA1-1: EP167/168 Work Programme NT Exploration Permit (EP) 167/168 Environment Management Plan

The Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) is Central Australia's peak community environmental organisation that has been advocating for the protection of nature and ecologically sustainable development of the arid lands since 1980. The ALEC community have been closely following the development of the Beetaloo Basin for 8 years now, and know this to be one of the most important issues to our membership, who have demonstrated their commitment to this issue by crowdfunding a position the frack free coordinator position at ALEC and showing a keen interest in ALEC's campaign updates, submission writing workshops and forums on this topic. ALEC's policy work on fracking has focused on close engagement with the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory handed down by Justice Pepper (Pepper Inquiry) and its subsequent implementation. In the past year consulted with our membership and community on the AMGP pipeline, Senate Inquiry into the Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Policy, the Greenhouse Gas offsets policy and co-organised a webinar on this EMP and others proposed for the Beetaloo Basin in late Jan which was attended by 148 people. ALEC actively contributes to the development of energy and resources policy through regulatory reform, written submissions, community education and advocacy within the community. ALEC welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on IMA1-1: EP167/168 Work Programme NT Exploration Permit (EP) 167/168 Environment Management Plan.

We believe this EMP fails to meet the requirements of the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016 (NT) on numerous grounds and must be rejected. It is alarming to see the amount of key information and approvals missing from this EMP. The overriding impression from this EMP is that Imperial is asking the regulator for broad approval to drill 6 wells on these two EPs and to figure out the details of how and where as they go. Some of our key concerns with this EMP are;

- The lack of concern for the rights of Traditional Owners and custodians, demonstrated by the lack of consultation, lack of AAPA sacred site clearance certificate, and inadequate archaeological survey, suggesting this EMP does not meet minimum FPIC and cultural heritage standards.



- A severely flawed greenhouse gas emissions assessment, which does not have a greenhouse gas abatement plan despite appearing to be above the threshold set out in the large emitters policy.
- The use of buried wastewater flowlines, and no mention of the quantity or composition of the wastewater to be transported through them, or of how and when they will be decommissioned.
- a misleading or misinformed response to the question of cumulative impacts
- Lack of identification of the precise location, number and design of proposed wells, making a realistic risk assessment impossible.

These basic errors, inconsistencies, and major omissions suggest that Imperial has clearly not dedicated sufficient resources to do this EMP properly and lacks respect for the regulatory process and the NT environment and communities they are designed to protect. To allow this proposal to proceed in its current form would severely undermine the regulatory system and set a terrible precedent. We are particularly concerned with the following aspects of the EMP:

Despite finding 12 distinct archaeological sites in the areas it wants to clear, Imperial does not appear to have consulted directly with Traditional Owners:

- Imperial has not yet received a clearance certificate from the Aboriginal Area Protection Area - which is a necessary component for an EMP to be approved under the Regulations
- The archaeological survey commissioned for the EMP found 12 different archaeological sites just from aerial surveying, but there's no details provided as to how Imperial will ensure either these known sites and given they have only done aerial surveys looking for waterholes and rocky outcrops it seems likely there are other archaeological sites they have not included.
- Imperial does not refer to any on-country or other in-person meetings with Traditional Owners about the risks to sites

Imperial wants to drill 48 new water bores and extract 380ML groundwater, and risks polluting aquifers with toxic drilling fluids:

- Imperial hasn't obtained a Groundwater Extraction Licence, and doesn't identify which aquifers it will be draining for its project
- There's no Water Allocation Plan in place, meaning that there's no way of knowing if Imperial can sustainably extract its water without affecting other water users
- The important aquifer in the Beetaloo - the Cambrian Limestone Aquifer - is recharged through sinkholes; there are many sinkholes across EPs 167 and 168, creating the real risk of contamination from chemical and wastewater spills

- Imperial acknowledges that drilling fluids - which contain toxic chemicals - are regularly 'lost' totally in the shallow aquifers intersected by gas wells
- Imperial proposes to use "wastewater flowlines" aka wastewater pipelines between its wells, which increase the risk of contamination due to corrosion from the concentrated wastewater and are prone to leaks due to soil movement and erosion, especially after large flooding events and in the black soil country where they are planning to drill which is known for its instability.

Imperial wants to clear over 250ha of land, including delicate vegetation communities along waterways, and haven't submitted a rehabilitation plan:

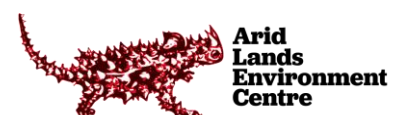
- Imperial wants permission to clear 254ha, including riparian vegetation communities along streams which provide important habitat for local wildlife & threatened species
- Imperial hasn't bothered properly identifying where exactly its wells will be located - instead, it wants permission to clear a potential 10 sites and associated access tracks - this both increases the scale of its environmental impacts and means that it's impossible to assess the actual risks of its project
- It proposes to build 90km of buried pipelines to move wastewater from fracking to a central location for processing – but it does not include any proposal for how or where it will be processed.
- It hasn't submitted a plan for rehabilitating the land destroyed by its fracking project, despite this being a clear requirement under the Regulations

The EMP fails to acknowledge the risk of chemicals and methane leaking from wells, underground pipes and storage tanks:

- Imperial doesn't even mention the possibility of the corrosion of its wells or underground pipes (used to transport toxic wastewater), let alone propose measures to protect against this risk
- The EMP's plan for preventing risks to surface waterways from erosion is generic and hasn't been developed in relation to the exact locations of Imperial's fracking operations - but Imperial still states that 'the risk of erosion is small'

Imperial is trying to hide the true scale of the greenhouse gas emissions that will arise from its fracking program:

- The EMP provides inconsistent estimates of the expected greenhouse gas emissions - 280kt in one table, and 305kt in another
- There's no details provided about how Imperial arrived at these calculations



- The expected 305kt CO2-e is approximately 1.47% of the NT's entire emissions for 2019, just for one company's exploration activities
- Imperial excludes the 17.3kt CO2 emitted from land clearing from its annual total, in order to pretend that its operations fall short of the 100kt trigger for reporting to the Government and Clean Energy Regulator

We at Arid Lands Environment Centre have been speaking with our colleagues at Central Australian Frack Free Alliance, Protect Country Alliance and Lock The Gate about our shared concerns in regard to this EMP, and support all the points they make in their submissions. Given the indepth work these groups have done in analysing this EMP we don't think it's necessary to repeat these same points in depth, but instead write in support of those submissions, in particular Central Australian Frack Free Alliance's section on the disrespectful and inadequate approach to cultural heritage protection and first nations consultation, Protect Country Alliance's section on the risks associated with underground flowlines including those of increased corrosion and erosion risk and Lock the Gate's expert advice on stakeholder engagement and flora and fauna.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this EMP.

Kind regards, Hannah Ekin, Central Australian Frack Free Coordinator on behalf of Arid Lands Environment Centre.

